

AELTC has a page of 'Mythbusters' on its website to counter perceptions in the community. Some of these are perfectly valid. Others appear to SGCARA to be highly-misleading. The contentious 'Mythbusters' are below in GREEN (as they appear on the AELTC website page) with SGCARA's comment following each.

A key aim of the project and a core part of the development proposals is to enhance, improve and recognise the unique heritage interest of the Site. The landscape proposals reflect the spirit of the Capability Brown design in form and appearance but look to recreate the site as 21st century parkland. Brownian features such as rolling, naturalistic topography, scattered trees and using the lake as a focal point will underpin the character of this reimagined landscape.

Land will need to be levelled for each of the 38 proposed grass courts. How is this creating a '*rolling naturalistic topography*'?

Importantly, the removal of the golf infrastructure of fairways, bunkers greens and tees (all part of the existing heavily managed landscape), will restore the landscape's open and more naturalistic character. It will also reveal some of the historic views both into and across the site which have been lost under the golf course template.

There is no acknowledgement of the elements that will destroy & detract from the 'historic views' across the site. These include the enormous Show Court. (This would have a capacity of 8000. For comparison the Royal Albert Hall has a capacity of 6000). AELTC makes no mention of the electric fences that would surround each of the proposed 38 grass courts for much of the year when not in use, nor of the hard-surface path/roadways that would criss-cross the site. (There is no hard-surfacing on the current golf course.) Construction of the 38 grass courts would itself constitute a very '*heavily-managed*' landscape. Each court is concrete-edged and constructed with layers of loams & soils not 'native' to the location. We are told that each court would be subject to 'steaming' to eliminate unwanted organic life. This presumably includes earth worms & other creatures essential to healthy soil-function, but unwanted on a tennis court. There is no acknowledgement by AELTC that management of golf-courses has in fact evolved to be much more environmentally-friendly.

The proposed design of the new Parkland Show Court responds directly to the landscape and the site's rich heritage. It is intended as a world class building, reflecting the status and profile of The Championships, whilst also being sensitive to its setting with regards to scale, form, and materiality. The new Show Court has been located within one of the lower parts of the golf course and has been conceived as an extension of the landscape, set within a ring of mature oak trees, minimising the impact on its setting.

AELTC's own CGIs indicate how the Show Court would dominate - and detract from – precious vistas within Wimbledon Park. AELTC's suggestion that it is '*sensitive to its setting*' is untenable.

The risks to the precious '*ring of (veteran) oak trees*' of deprivation of light from the 100+ feet high Show Court are indicated in the item on this page quoting tree expert Dave Lofthouse.

The remaining buildings are all also designed to blend into the landscape. The central maintenance hub will be subterranean and largely accommodated below ground by utilising the topography of the southern end of the site.

The 'central maintenance hub' would be located within the 'public parkland'. It would be a very large building, requiring substantial landscape modification to construct it. The entrances would still be very visible and require hard-surface access pathways for maintenance vehicles & equipment.

We take the importance of preserving the local environment and heritage very seriously. Therefore, central to our proposals is the creation of one of London's first new public parks since the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park opened almost a decade ago. The new park will be 9.4 hectares and will allow public access to the previously private golf course land located within the southern part of the site.

...The new park will be managed and maintained by us and will be open to the public at the same hours as the public Wimbledon Park. The park will only close to general public use for a short period during The Championships and Qualifying Event periods but will be open for the public to use throughout the remainder of the year.

...We have no further plans to expand beyond those included within the scope of the current planning application.

As it stands, the public would have 'permissive access' only to this parkland. Public access could be withdrawn by AELTC at any time, eg if in the future they decided that they would like to develop that land for additional tennis-features. AELTC are denying that they would ever wish to build on it. However, that is exactly what they said of the whole site when they purchased it from Merton Council in 1993. Regretfully, that gives no good reason to believe their undertaking this time.

It has been suggested that if AELTC are serious about this parkland being open to the public in perpetuity, they should agree to it being put into public ownership via a community trust but with the AELTC under a long-term maintenance obligation. There is no sign of AELTC being prepared to commit to this.

The parkland would be closed to the public for the 3 weeks proposed for Qualifying/Championship Tennis, (& perhaps for any other LTA tournaments that might take place on the 'new' site?) There is a suggestion in the Application that the parkland might also be closed for unspecified periods of 'maintenance'.

Parts of this permissive-access parkland are very steep, so public-enjoyment of the whole area would be restricted. The event car park would also absorb some of the available land.

The site is also designated as a 'Site of Nature Conservation Interest'. However, the current golf course is a heavily managed and maintained landscape which has constrained the on-site ecology and limited the range of available natural habitats. The development proposals look to significantly enhance the on-site biodiversity by improving the main habitat types of wetland, woodland, parkland, and grassland to achieve a significant net gain.

Respected Ecologist Dr Dave Dawson contends in his Planning Application Objection (uploaded in full to this page) that the methodology & timing of bio-diversity studies undertaken on behalf of AELTC have

greatly underestimated the rich bio-diversity already present throughout the site. He contends that the proposals would be negative for bio-diversity. The negative impact on a 'Site of Nature Conservation' from many thousands of visitors during matches, as opposed to very small numbers playing quiet rounds of golf will be obvious.

The proposal offers the opportunity to repair and bring back some of the original landscaping designed by Brown, and significantly enhance ecology/biodiversity value. The proposal will double the number of trees on the golf course through the retention and protection of veteran trees and significant new planting - giving a net gain of 1,500 important new, resilient trees.

The vista of any 'original landscaping' that may be restored to the relatively small area proposed for the parkland will be seriously impaired by the visual dominance of the Show Court, the tightly-packed 38 grass courts & their associated infrastructure.

The eventual net gain in numbers of trees will be preceded in the early stages by the proposed felling of 296 trees. It will take many many years for the new trees to replace the loss in terms of visual beauty, nature-habitat & also pollution/carbon capture functions. The intervening years will be negative for bio-diversity.

Brownian features such as rolling, naturalistic topography, scattered trees and using the lake as a focal point will underpin the character of this reimagined landscape. Importantly, the removal of the golf infrastructure of fairways, bunkers greens and tees (all part of the existing heavily managed landscape), will restore the landscape's open and more naturalistic character. It will also reveal some of the historic views both into and across the site which have been lost under the golf course template.

To the casual onlooker, walking along Church Rd & looking through the railings, the aspect of the current Golf Course appears natural & pleasantly 'pastoral'. Replacing the current golf fairways etc with a huge Show Court & 38 grass courts would seem to SGCARA to create a far more '*heavily-managed landscape*' & certainly not an '*open & more naturalist character*'. One commentator has described the AELTC proposals as creating '*an industrial tennis factory*'.

...the de-silting and environmental works to Wimbledon Park Lake (safeguarding its long-term future); wider community benefits; and significant ecology and biodiversity improvements.

...Wimbledon Park Lake is owned by the London Borough of Merton and the AELTC is committed to working with the Council to secure the de-silting and wider environmental improvements as part of these development works

...The Planning Application sets out the community benefits we will deliver as part of the development proposals for the site. We are in negotiation with both the London Boroughs of Merton and Wandsworth on community benefits that are generated from the proposal.

Contributing to the long-overdue de-silting of Wimbledon Park lake is a stated AELTC's stated '*community benefit*'. However, there is uncertainty about its exact worth as a '*community benefit*'. Is AELTC proposing to take full financial responsibility for the de-silting? to take responsibility for a certain percentage of the final cost? to offer a fixed contribution towards the final cost? There is also no certainty about how de-silting would be achieved, with Dr Dave Dawson expressing concern for the overall health of the lake that would result from one method apparently suggested by AELTC.

How can a Planning Application be effectively determined if the 'Community benefits' that are central to its validity have not been pre-agreed & clearly formulated before Application?

The proposed boardwalks will provide public access around the perimeter of Wimbledon Park Lake for the first time. The boardwalks have been carefully located to provide safe access while also protecting the existing sensitive habitats around the Lake edge.

The walkway right round the lake is not a '*community benefit*' associated with the current AELTC proposals. At the 1993 sale of the Wimbledon Park Golf Club land to AELTC, a legal obligation was entered into to construct this walkway when golf ceased on the site. It was intended to be on the land surrounding the lake, not mostly on a board-walk. SGCARA's understanding is that one contributory reason for choosing not to site more of the walk-way on land may be AELTC's wish to relinquish as little land as possible, to enable the proposed tightly-packed 38 grass courts.

The lake, including the lake-bed of course, is owned by Merton Council. The board-walks would therefore utilise land owned by Merton, not AELTC. Using board-walks to achieve much of the walkway means that AELTC would substantially be using land owned by Merton to provide the walkway they are legally-contracted to deliver. AELTC appears to be seeking to surrender as small a part of their own land as possible for public access.

During those three weeks, the 493 Bus will be rerouted locally to avoid Church Road. Data from 2021 showed this had little impact on local traffic, and improved bus journey time and reliability. Initial data also showed the closure had a positive effect in reducing through traffic, which was broadly welcomed by close neighbours.

AELTC's data from the 2021 closure of Church Rd has been challenged. Local residents have said that it did lead to traffic-delays. Users of the 493 bus have also spoken of slower journeys, significant as the bus takes attendees to St George's & Queen Mary's hospitals. Residents have also asserted that traffic problems were suppressed in 2021 by reduced use of the roads, from the ongoing prevalence of 'working from home'.

Overall, for the Championships period, we wish to link both parts of our site as one seamless event space with a central focus on Centre Court during The Championships.

We also propose a series of improvements to the layout and design of Church Road which will enhance pedestrian safety and comfort and encouraging active travel such as cycling year-round. This will result in an overall improvement to Church Road. Alternative pedestrian and cycle routes will also be identified for use during The Championships and Qualifying periods, to avoid any significant disruption.

This AELTC 'Mythbuster' does not make clear the proposal contained in AELTC's Planning Application that even pedestrians & cyclists without tennis-tickets will not be allowed through the section of Church Rd closed for the Championships/Qualifiers. Both groups will have to follow extensive diversions, the suggested timings of which appear to be unrealistic.